

LIBRARY REPORT

For the period April to August 2020

Context for this Report

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Society's premises were closed for much of Spring and early Summer. The Librarian and Archivist worked from home between late March and mid-June, when they began gradually to return to the office.

The Library Reading Room re-opened to readers from Thursday 23 July, for one day per week, by appointment only. Before we re-opened, we posted new guidance for visitors in light of the government guidelines. We are grateful for advice and comments from a number of people, notably David Jacobs, which helped inform this guidance.

After returning to the office, staff were able to resume work with physical collections, making it easier to complete reprographics orders and other enquiries. It also meant we could make smoother progress with cataloguing and other collections-based projects, though of course this remained slower than usual.

Since re-opening the Library to users, we have seen slow but steady demand. We would like to increase our opening hours (perhaps from one to two days per week), but ongoing uncertainty about restrictions on business operations makes it difficult to plan very far in advance.

Throughout this period, staff have continued to respond to enquiries; maintain a visible and active online profile, via the Society's blog, website, and social media accounts; and have progressed with cataloguing, collections research, policy schedules, digital library projects, and staff recruitment.

Staffing

The Society's Archivist, Nancy Charley, tendered her resignation during the Summer, in order to devote more time to her writing career. We advertised for a replacement, and conducted interviews in late August. Emma Jones has been appointed as the new Archivist, and will start in early October. Emma had a one-week handover from Nancy.

I would like to thank Nancy for all her hard work and dedication over the past six years.

Digitization

We received a request from the Byoma Kusuma Buddhadharma Sangha foundation to digitize 28 manuscripts from the Hodgson Collection. We expect digitization to begin in October.

Other mooted digitization projects, pertaining to the Akhbarat (court circulars) of Emperor Aurangzeb, and Persian and Buginese manuscripts, are on hold. This is due to a combination of lack of funds and general disruption caused by the pandemic.

We hope to soon be able to add another 18 Malay manuscripts to the Digital Library.

Digital Library

Between April and August, the Digital Library received 4,650 visits from 3,460 users, with almost 17,000 page views. This is almost double the numbers for the same period last year, no doubt due to the closure of the Society and other public heritage spaces. 30% of this traffic came from the USA and UK, and another 30% from India, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The most popular collections were Malay manuscripts, Indian manuscripts, the Juki and Gulistan, and the Manning Archive.

We added five new manuscripts to the Digital Library: four from the Tod Collection, plus one Persian manuscript. We also added numerous high-quality images of Indian artworks to the Digital Library, which were digitized as part of the ongoing Tod project and in connection with Dr Giles Tillotson's (postponed) exhibition at the DAG in Delhi.

Acquisitions

Michael Willis has offered to donate two C19th manuscripts to the collection.

RAS Archives

The Archivist's report is appended as a separate document.

Collections Open Evening

We will try and arrange a new date for the postponed Collections Evening, so that it can be held as an online event, via Zoom, before the end of the year.

Users and enquiries

Between the Reading Room re-opening in late July and the end of August, five researchers visited to use the collections. We responded to 97 remote enquiries between April and August. Since the end of August, we have continued to receive a steady stream of enquiries about the collections and about using the Reading Room.

Cataloguing

After returning to the building in mid-June, we added 104 records to the online library catalogue.

Volunteers

Our volunteer programme continues to be suspended. While we would like to resume volunteering activities, this needs to take place within a wider context of risk management. There has been limited advice from the wider heritage sector about returning to work with volunteers. All our volunteers have expressed interest in returning when possible, including Roger Parsons, Ian Herbertson, Ian Scholey, Lily Colgan, Emmanuel Buenaventura, as well as our Arts Society volunteers: Fenny Green, Chris Ashdown, Martyn Duncumb, and Inma Bowen. Use of public transport to reach the Society has been the main concern expressed by volunteers.

We received a request from SOAS to accommodate Yin Nyein Aye, an Alphawood MA scholar, for a heritage internship via remote working. The Librarian met with Yin to discuss cataloguing some of our Burmese manuscripts, which were digitized as part of the Palm Leaf Manuscript project but which remain largely unidentified. Yin expressed enthusiasm for completing this work remotely in the new year, after she has returned to Myanmar.

Jung Min contacted us about the possibility of doing an internship at the Society after she finished her degree this Autumn. She has just completed an MA in Korean Studies at SOAS as a recipient of the Korean Government Long-Term Fellowship for Overseas Study.

Reprographic services

205 copies were made from RAS collections between April and August, including 100 by RAS staff, for which we charged £349. The remainder were photographs taken by researchers after the Reading Room re-opened.

Visits and conferences

All group visits and meetings at the Society have been suspended until further notice. We will look for opportunities to publicise the collections and our activities via Zoom and other platforms.

Loans to exhibitions

The loan of the Tod astronomical Panchanga to the Tekniska Museum in Stockholm is still scheduled to take place between December 2020 and September 2021.

We are expecting to receive a loan request for our Sir Richard Burton memorabilia, in connection with an exhibition that was previously scheduled to start in February 2021 but has now been pushed back to the Summer.

Publicity

The Librarian was interviewed about the RAS and its collections for the podcast series of digitization company Max Communications, which highlights special collections across a variety of heritage institutions. The Librarian also provided a guest blog for the Explore Your Archives campaign during the Summer. The Librarian's lecture for the Athenaeum Club, originally scheduled for July, was postponed until November.

Other projects

The Environment Trust has invited us to contribute to discussions about a conference on Sir Richard Burton and Europeans completing the Hajj during the early modern/ Victorian period, tentatively scheduled to take place in late 2021. We expressed our desire to help shape this event.

We are looking into the possibility of preparing a funding bid to support a collaborative PhD project on our E.W. West papers, pertaining to Zoroastrian studies in late C19th India.

Basement

Temperature and humidity readings in the basement were within acceptable parameters. The lower building occupancy during the Summer did not lead to any problems, and staff have continued to inspect the basement regularly.

Edward Weech, Librarian

Archive Report

This is my final report as the Archivist of the RAS so I wanted to start by expressing my thanks and gratitude to the Library Committee for their support and encouragement over the last 6 years. It has been a joy and privilege to work with the Society's collections and I would wish my successor, Emma Jones, a similarly fruitful time.

Over the last few months several catalogues have been added to Archives Hub. The catalogue for the Papers for the Gibb Memorial Trust was completed while still working from home. Coming back into the Society has seen the completion of the catalogue for the first Governance Correspondence Volume and for a small selection of papers of Edward Conze, which were donated in April 2020. The majority of the Archivist's time has however been spent with the Papers of Angus C. Graham. I am delighted to report that the material is fully sorted and the catalogue for the collection is on Archives Hub.

Though there have been no volunteers coming into the Society, Lily Colgan has continued to work on the Papers of the West brothers remotely, as has Emmanuel Buenaventura on the Dennis Duncanson papers.

This report ends with a summation of the work completed during my time at the Society.

Archive Progress Report

The position of archivist was created in October 2014. After initial orientation, work began identifying the archives within the strong room and other store rooms. More than 250 boxes of various sizes were identified. Further acquisitions have increased the quantity of boxes including the Thomas Manning archive (4 boxes) and the Angus C. Graham archive (18 boxes) as well as acquiring some institutional archives from the Society's offices. However, some disposal has also occurred, for example, old cheque book stubs and bank statements. The boxes contained what would both traditionally be considered as archives and also the remaining objects within the collections. The contents of these boxes were all listed on to an Excel spreadsheet and each of the boxes given an identifying number.

Once all archives had been identified, work began to separate into the different categories. At this stage most archives were transferred to archival quality boxes. The categories created were:

1. Personal Papers
2. Royal Asiatic Society Institutional Archives
3. Special Collections
4. Objects (originally as part of Special Collections and then separated)

Personal Papers

Concurrently with listing of the boxes, cataloguing of some of the personal papers commenced. The first catalogue created on [Archives Hub](#) was for the [Papers of John Drew Bate](#) (1836-1923). The strategy for each collection of papers to be catalogued is to undertake a 'complete care package'. So, items are given basic conservation treatment such as cleaning and flattening, put into archival folders and boxes, alongside the actual cataloguing. Thus, each achieved catalogue also means that these collections are also physically ready and accessible for researchers.

Since the first catalogue for personal papers, over 60 further catalogues for personal papers have been added to Archives Hub, both by the archivist and by volunteers and interns. Some of these are small consisting of one or two items, or a single archival folder. However some are much larger, including the papers for [Brian Houghton Hodgson](#), [Horace Geoffrey Quaritch Wales](#), [Edward William West](#) and [Thomas Manning](#). Some papers benefited from previous partial lists which helped in creating the final catalogue.

Royal Asiatic Society Institutional Archives and Records Management

The records already in the archives were divided according to the activities that produced them. Categories were created for:

1. Allied Societies
2. Awards and Medals
3. Collections
4. Finance
5. Governance
6. Journal
7. Lectures and Events
8. Membership
9. Personnel
10. Property
11. Publications
12. Web and Social Media

As these records were collated in their categories, they were added to individual lists for each section. Further work has also commenced on these.

Special Collections

A few have been catalogued:

- SC1: Chinese Documents on Trade Regulations with the English
- SC2: Notebooks on India
- SC3: Extracts from the Records of Bombay and Surat
- SC4: Grammaire Tagalog
- SC5: An Enquiry into the Order of Chapters of the Qur'ān
- SC6: Chinese-English Dictionary
- SC7: The Cities and Towns of China
- SC8: Introduction on the Elements of the Afghan language

Objects

A list of the Society's objects has been made.

Other Collections Responsibilities

Photographs

A large project has been undertaken with the photographic collections involving several placement students and interns. This has enabled all the photographic collections to have bespoke packaging and be catalogued on to the Library Catalogue. There is also an up-to-date handlist available in the Reading Room.

Glass Slides

Sorting and cataloguing of the glass slides are currently underway. Eight collections have already been correctly housed and catalogued. Most of the slides are correctly packaged but need identifying and cataloguing.

Slides

Most of the slides have been correctly packaged and listed. There is also a large collection of 35 mm slides of the RAS Collections which are packaged but not listed. All slides still need cataloguing.

Artworks

A previous volunteer project has ensured that all artworks on display are correctly labelled and catalogued. A current volunteer is working through some of the artworks to see which are currently catalogued. At some point a full audit of the artworks would be advisable.

Maps

The card catalogue for the map collection has been transcribed to an Excel spreadsheet by a volunteer. The maps are an area where work needs to be done both in their care and cataloguing. Some are badly in need of conservation.

Nancy Charley, Archivist